1: Fitzgerald H-5 (1937-1938) AE3 Sino-Tibetan
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On the Burma Road. Yang Lao Kuan pass.

Min Chia junks on Erh Hai lake.

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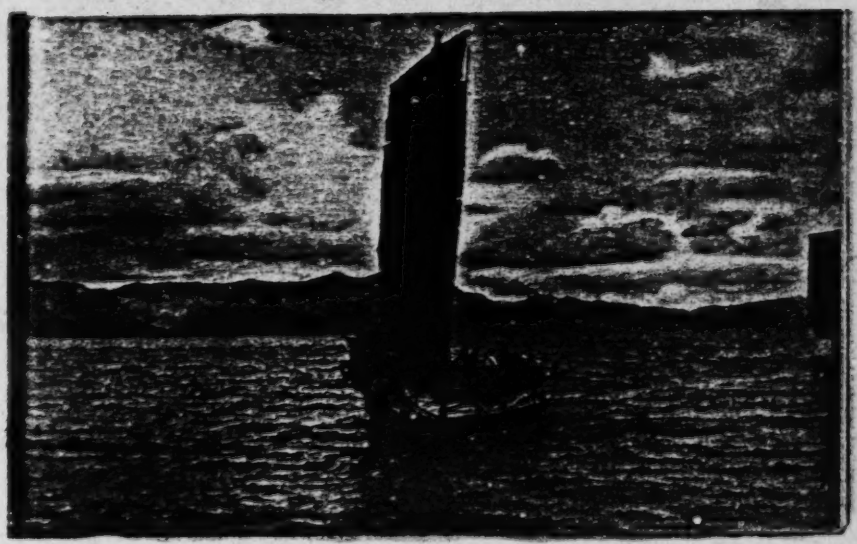

[Face p. 198]

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are usually shipped to all the villages and towns around the lake. 505

This traffic is entirely in the hands of Min Chia boat people, for none of the boat owners are Yunnanese Chinese or Moslems. The fact is interesting, for it raises the problem of whence the Min Chia obtained a knowledge of boat building and navigation. The nearest places where large sailing boats are in use are the Irrawaddy at Bhamo, about three hundred miles from Ta Li, and the K'un Yang lake, near which stands K'un Ming, the provincial capital. This lake is two hundred and seventy miles from Ta Li, and the junks used there are in every way unlike those that ply on the Erh Hai at Ta Li. The Erh Hai boats, which have the 501 distinction of sailing on what is probably the highest 502 sheet of navigated water in the world (6,700ft.), are much larger than those on the K'un Yang lake, and many details of their construction suggest that they are the product of a long and independent development. The largest ships are fifty feet long, with a beam of six to eight feet, and are built of heavy walnut planks, pegged together without the use of nails, the joints being closed with lime and cement, not caulked. This method seems clumsy, but in fact they do not leak if well looked after. The boat is almost flat-bottomed, but is fitted with a very large rudder which, when in use, projects deeper than the bottom of the boat and serves as a keel to correct leeway. This rudder has to be taken up and shipped when the boat approaches shallow water.

The Min Chia count on the wind for propulsion, and such oars as exist are rudimentary and clumsy paddles only used for manoeuvring the large boats in calms where the water is too deep to use poles. Boats are fitted with a mast which is made of pine, and is often thirty feet long. The sail is made of rice straw mats, strengthened with bamboo lathes so that when lowered it folds on itself in concertina fashion. It is raised by hauling on a cowhide rope, which passes over

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501 the forked top of the mast, the slightly greasy cowhide
502 acting as a lubricant in the absence of pulleys. All ropes and sheets used on these boats are made of this material which is, of course, very strong and enduring. The larger boats have a cabin at the prow, which is raised well above the water line, and thus seems at a distance to be the poop, as in Chinese junks. On Erh Hai boats the necessity of shipping the heavy cumbersome rudder in shallow water makes it impossible to have the cabin at the poop. The whole boat can also be covered in rainy weather with curved mat roofs fitted on a bamboo frame, and is thus weatherproof, which makes boating by far the most comfortable way of travelling in the rainy season.

502 In a stiff breeze the Erh Hai boats can make very fast
132 passages, and sail fairly close to the wind, while when there is nothing but the slightest of airs it is still possible to sail them owing to the very large spread of the towering mat sail. On the other hand, they are admitted to be dangerous in the violent squally winds which sweep across the lake in winter. These winds off the Ts'ang Shan range are a peculiar feature of the winter climate of Ta Li, due to the conjunction of a very high mountain and the lake. They come at irregular intervals, without warning, and the direction of the wind is unpredictable. At one moment the air is still under a cloudless sky, at the next, with a roar like an express train, the squall sweeps down across the plain raising clouds of dust, and then is gone. A few minutes later another squall approaches, from the opposite direction. In such weather sailing is very dangerous, and the boatmen either hoist only a small part of the sail, or prefer to punt along the shallows.

502 The larger Erh Hai boats are usually handled by a crew of three or four, who are the owner and his family. Apart from hoisting the sail, which is heavy work requiring all hands,

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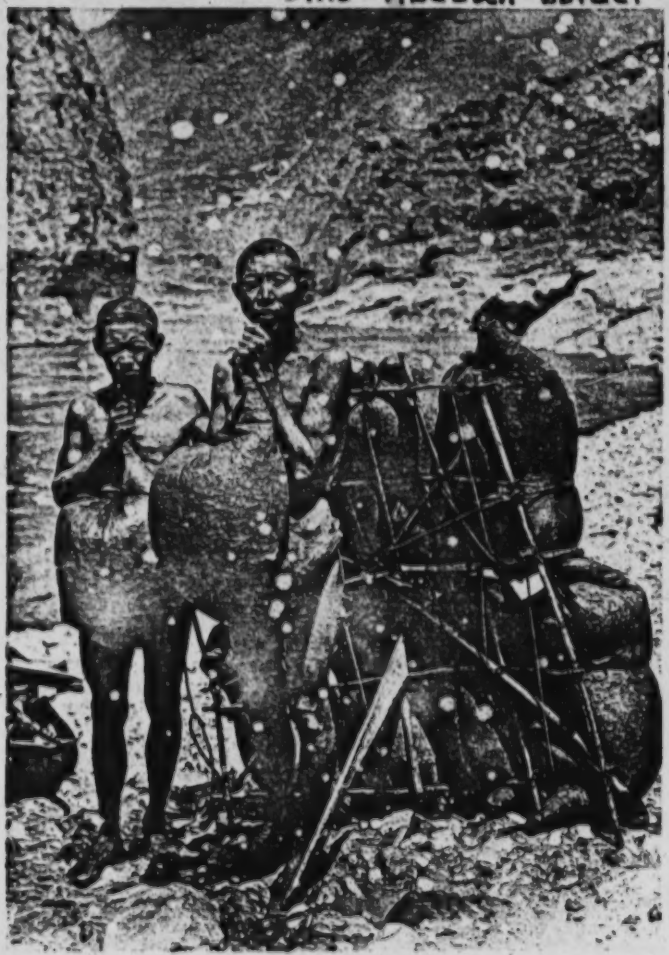

PLATE 143. — NA-KHI SWIMMERS WITH THEIR RAFT

打箭爐納西泅水

Every time they plunge into the icy waters of the Yangtze, they must inflate their goatskin bags as well as those of the raft.

[p. 244 ©]